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Executive

Lifting capability

It takes more than
a course to develop
leaders in aged care fit
for the future, writes
NATASHA EGAN.

From a capability review undertaken in 2019, Victorian aged care provider Benetas identified empowered leadership as one of six critical priorities to deliver its five-year Next Generation Strategy.

Andrew Jamieson, head of talent and capability at Benetas, says this means giving leaders the trust, support and tools to exercise leadership and to be accountable.

“We don’t see this notion of empowered leadership as a nice thing to have or a box to check. We see it as fundamental to our organisation’s ability to deliver on the strategy and our ability to meet the real needs of our customers and clients,” Jamieson tells *Australian Ageing Agenda*.

He says leadership development is critical to an organisation’s success. But too often people find themselves in management and executive roles after being successful in a technical or functional position even though the capabilities and skills they need to fully succeed as a leader can be different, says Jamieson.

“In the aged care sector we too often see leaders step down in their responsibility. Often because they’re more comfortable delivering on their area of expertise, and sometimes because the organisational culture doesn’t enable them to fully embrace their position.

“This might feel like a safe choice, but it inevitably leads to a domino effect that sadly results in others below them



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stepping down in their work. This not only compromises growth and sadly limits a provider's potential, but it also affects accountability, which can cause confusion, frustration and wider cultural issues," he says.

While delivering a course or training program can provide staff solid foundations for leadership development, achieving empowered leadership requires much more, says Jamieson.

"It's important to also focus heavily on behaviour change in the workplace supported by leaders who can provide wider coaching and mentorship to others," he says.

Jamieson says Benetas has adopted several initiatives to support these efforts including:

- a leadership skills development program that also focuses on strategic alignment and networking
- a well-known global leadership competency framework to guide leadership development
- a leadership self-insights tool to enhance self-reflection and improve collaboration and communication across the leadership team and beyond
- an immersive 'Leader-As-Coach' program to support senior leaders to embrace a leadership culture of coaching
- one-on-one support and 360-degree feedback sessions for members of the executive team.

Going forward, Benetas is placing its core focus on ensuring learning is brought to life and felt through the impact that leaders have in empowering their teams, Jamieson says.

"That's where the change is made, and that's much harder to bring about."

Benetas' approach includes ensuring course content is integrated into the participant's work. The most important part of attending a course is implementing the learning and improving leadership impact, which is where the manager comes in, says Jamieson.

"They help to set the context and outcomes for the course beforehand and then work with the participant on how they can integrate the learning on the job to shift from what they learned to how they behave as a leader."

The other key element is ensuring employees are challenged in their existing role. As research shows much of what people learn is gained through experience, it is critical to provide experiential learning opportunities for leaders, says Jamieson.

That means actively providing stretch opportunities for people to act up, have broader responsibilities and accountability, contribute to organisation-wide projects, participate in strategic committees and represent the organisation externally, he says.

"Recently I asked a member of my team to present on an industry webinar I was asked to deliver, and last year our CEO asked me to present on behalf of the organisation at an international conference. This is something that we're working to instil across each team and each business unit for current and future Benetas leaders to experience."

Jamieson says they are also looking at how to provide accelerated development for high-potential talent, who are high performers assessed to have potential to succeed in more senior roles.

"The challenge is how to support their development and to retain them for the future."

Skilling tomorrow's leaders

A combination of education, training and mentoring is a good approach to leadership development says Robin Harvey, a lecturer in gerontology at Charles Sturt University and



Andrew Jamieson



Robin Harvey



Cynthia Payne

co-convenor of the Australian Association of Gerontology Ageing, Workforce and Education Special Interest Group.

"There is a real need for the more formal education for leaders," Harvey tells AAA. She says all aged care leaders should build on their disciplinary qualifications with ageing knowledge

specific to their particular discipline.

"Knowledge in skills in understanding ageing as a holistic experience is really important."

That applies to clinical and administrative leaders. The professional registration training requirements for people in health disciplines are already "fairly crowded" but these professionals need a speciality level of learning about ageing on top of that to develop their leadership capability, Harvey says.

"There is also room for people going into administration management areas like organisational management rather than clinical leadership management to be looking at getting certificates and gerontology knowledge as well to be tuned in to what's possible," she says.

"Mentorship is always a great thing if you can get that in organisations," says Harvey.

"Certainly the aged care system hasn't been well geared to provide that."

Building career pathways is another important element of leadership development, says Harvey, and particularly so for personal care workers.

"We need to attract people who are keen to go places and make a career out of it. Also there are lots of workers out there who are really dedicated, committed and have the capacity to do more."

Harvey says another education opportunity for leaders is via partnerships between a university and aged care organisations to develop targeted leadership short courses or micro qualifications that can be built upon towards a qualification.

In addition to a thorough understanding of ageing, aged care leaders should have the skills to challenge ageism, which still occurs a lot in Australia's health and aged care systems, and understand aged care research.

"You don't necessarily need to be an expert or be up on all the latest research, but you need to understand that whole research context and that we are growing, developing and learning things all the time," she says.

The AAG, for example, is a good multidisciplinary organisation that can help leaders stay in touch with the development and understanding of best practice, she says.

To get the most out of education, participants should choose an area that is going to map well with their area of practice, or that really challenges them, says Harvey.

"I would like to see that the industry appreciates the value of education and supports people much more. It could be with encouraging mentorship or helping sponsor their education."

There is also a great deal of room for the government to provide incentives for people in aged care to undertake leadership education and training, she says.

A focus on improving capability

Leadership development, executive training and mentoring are among the offerings of Sydney-based aged care consultancy Anchor Excellence. Cynthia Payne, managing director of organisation, says they are collectively aiming to improve the capability of the industry, says.

"I have always been passionate about capability as such an important element for the industry. Not only in terms of meeting consumers' needs, but in taking the industry to where



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it needs to go. That's boards, executives and managers, and that's our sweet spot at Anchor Excellence," Payne tells AAA.

One of Anchor Excellence's programs is the compliance essentials masterclass for key personnel about their responsibilities, which Payne co-teaches with aged care lawyer Julie McStay from Thomson Geer.

"We have supported over 500 leaders nationally with that particular program, which is fabulous," says Payne. She says the strong take up demonstrates that leaders are clearly engaged in developing their skills.

The course targets key personnel under the *Aged Care Act*, which includes board members, executives with influence over the control or operations of an approved aged care organisation, and roles like the regional manager and most senior nursing person at a service level, says Payne.

"Today, if you are new to the industry and you joined an aged care provider, our program is the only program available that covers what those approved provider obligations are and what it means to be key personnel."

Payne says she collaborated with McStay to develop the masterclass after recognising a lot of new people while supporting Bupa as the national administrator. The course also targets key personnel who have been in the industry for a long time, says Payne, because they often haven't had the training as they moved through various roles.

"A part of it affirms their knowledge. A part of it clarifies their knowledge," she says. The five-module course also has evolved into a "director's cut version" for board members, which is a condensed one-hour option available completely online.

"We have picked up that board members need to be across it at a high level but not to the degree that we necessarily cover in the five modules," Payne says.

Anchor Excellence also offers a clinical management and governance essentials masterclass. This year has seen the organisation adapt to the times and pivot from face-to-face delivery around the country to online and remote delivery.

"You don't necessarily need to be an expert or be up on all the latest research, but you need to understand that whole research context and that we are growing, developing and learning things all the time"

It has improved their reach as well as accessibility and convenience for often time-poor aged care leaders, says Payne.

"That for me is about improving the capability of the industry."

Anchor Excellence also offer business mentoring for business owners as well as mentoring for executives and clinical managers. It is a rigorous program supported by a framework that helps participants unpack the things that are going to be important, says Payne.

She says a good mentoring program starts with what the mentee has aspirations for, such as their aspirations to grow in their current role or to position themselves for a promotion or advancement into another level.

"That framework helps them think about their role in driving organisational performance. It is about them as an individual. It is about them in a team if they are leading a team or part of an executive team," Payne says. "It is also about their personal aspirations and goals."

Any good mentoring process is about each session, the mentee and mentor preparing themselves and using that session constructively, she says. "Generally at the end the day the mentee is capturing some key actions they might focus on between sessions, and helping with a bit of accountability as well." ■